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U.S. Alerted to Embassy Bugs in '79

But Task Force Believed It Could 'Neutralize' Soviet Devices

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The United States knew from the start of construction in 1979 on its new embassy complex in Moscow that the Soviet Union was planting listening devices in the chancery building, Assistant Secretary of State Robert E. Lamb said yesterday.

"We knew the Soviets were going to bug us," Lamb told the House subcommittee on international operations. "We had a strategy for finding it."

U.S. supervisors overseeing the construction were even given information "on bugs coming in" by American construction personnel and Navy Seabees working at the site, and a special interagency task force had been set up to counter the threat in 1979, Lamb said.

But the counterintelligence task force, established under President Jimmy Carter, did not foresee the possibility that the Soviets would use "the structure itself as part of the bugging," Lamb added.

He was referring to listening devices implanted in pieces of precast concrete and around the construction reinforcing bars that were made by a Soviet company away from the embassy site without U.S. supervision. Those materials were used in construction of the chancery walls and floors.

Not until August 1985, six years after construction began, did the Reagan administration halt all work on the chancery after discovering the hidden bugs. Soviet construction workers were "locked out" from the site then and work has not resumed since.

Lamb and his aides indicated yes-

terday that U.S. counterintelligence agents had first thought they could "neutralize" and turn their knowledge of Soviet bugging efforts to the advantage of the United States, but then discovered the devices were planted inside the building materials.

"These are the kind of things that are going to be difficult for us to neutralize," said Lamb, who is head of the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

The State Department official insisted it was "premature" to conclude that the only option open to the administration now is to tear down the bug-ridden new embassy chancery building and start all over again. "A lot of options have to be considered," he said.

Richard N. Dertadian, deputy assistant secretary of the department's Foreign Building Office, said the government is contemplating the "deconstruction" of the top two or three floors of the embassy chancery.

Asked by the subcommittee chairman, Rep. Daniel A. Mica (D-Fla.), what it would cost to "deconstruct" the top floors, Dertadian said it would be as much as the United States has already actually spent to build the chancery building—\$23 million of the total \$67 million appropriated. The remaining \$43 million is earmarked for internal furnishing and security.

Altogether, Congress has appropriated \$192 million for the entire embassy complex of eight buildings, six of which are already occupied by American diplomats, other personnel and their families.

Lamb sought to reassure outraged committee members that "very good technical minds" in the U.S. counterintelligence community are now at work to establish a secure area within the new embassy.

"We will not allow them to occupy Mount Alto until we have a secure embassy in Moscow," the State Department official said, referring to the still-unoccupied new Soviet chancery located on Mount Alto off Wisconsin Avenue.

He also said that if Americans were surprised at the Soviet methods used to bug the new U.S. Embassy in Moscow, the Soviets were "even more surprised" by the highly sophisticated countermeasures the United States had used to discover the implanted Soviet bugs.

Lamb, who has just returned from a 36-hour visit to Moscow, said he could give the subcommittee "some assurances on some points" that embassy security was "good" but that he came back concerned "in some other areas." He refused to elaborate in the public session but later briefed the subcommittee behind closed doors.

He said he had not seen a U.S. embassy "anywhere in the world" in worse condition than the one in Moscow, which he described as "a sloppy, dirty embassy, poorly maintained [which] makes it very difficult to protect the national security information that is in that building."

Lamb said unauthorized contacts between the Marine guards and Soviet women were not as widespread as first thought. After intense interrogation and some polygraph testing of the Moscow guards, it is now thought that "less than 10, maybe less than half a dozen," had known that "an individual Marine" was involved in "clandestine fraternization."

He was apparently referring to Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree, who has been charged with espionage and admitted he was having an affair with a Soviet woman who introduced him to a KGB agent. Another Marine, Cpl. Arnold Bracy, has also been accused of espionage.